

■ ■ ■ SPEECH BY H.E. MR. KEMBI-GITURA, AMBASSADOR OF KENYA TO THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT COALITION MEETING BRUSSELS, 23-28 JANUARY 2010

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Kenya, the African Elephant Coalition (AEC) and the Franz Weber Foundation, I wish to welcome you all to Brussels for this fourth meeting of AEC. I wish to acknowledge the representation of the Government of Mali, the co-chair with Kenya of the AEC, represented here by Mr. Bourama Niagate, the chairman of AEC. I also wish to acknowledge the effort that each one of you has made to be here for this meeting which has been called at short notice due to the urgency of the issues that we have to deal with over the next few days.

As you are all aware, the AEC was conceptualized in The Hague in 2007 during the 14th Conference of Parties. It is the time we were seeking a 20 year moratorium on ivory trade (but managed to get nine (9) years instead) with a view to saving the elephant species from moving towards extinction. Other meetings were held subsequent thereto, leading to the Bamako Declaration in February 2008, calling for the formalization of the Coalition as a united voice and a champion of conservation of the African elephant in its entire range in Africa. This meeting here in Brussels is the fourth in a series, and it affords us an important opportunity to prepare a common position of the African elephant and trade in ivory, in readiness for the 15th Meeting of CITES – the CoP15 in Doha, Qatar in March this year.

In the short space of the time since The Hague in 2007, the AEC has become a respected and cohesive coalition of like minded countries, speaking in one voice on elephant conservation and related issues. This coalition must, and will undoubtedly make a real difference in the elephant conservation effort across Africa. The Coalition, as you are all aware is steering the 37 African elephant range states in developing an action plan as a framework for guiding conservation of the species including establishing a financing mechanism for the action plan, the African Elephant Fund.

To ensure that the AEC is clearly heard, understood and respected, and to further strengthen and increase its influence during dialogue with other parties in fora such as CITES and with entities as the EU, it is important that AEC members complete the process of formalizing structures relating to membership, operational remit and decision making. Efforts should be made to reach out to other countries in the continent with elephants to buy into the principles and visions of AEC, and encourage them to join the coalition.

During CoP 14, the parties negotiated a nine-year moratorium on ivory trade to be effected following execution of a would be approved “one off” sale of 105 tonnes of ivory from Botswana, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. These sales took place in

October/November 2008. This is the date from which the nine-year moratorium started running, and should therefore end in or about October 2017. The idea of the moratorium was to create a substantive time frame during which no further proposals relating to ivory trade would be submitted to CITES in order to allow for the impact of the sales on poaching, illegal ivory trade and elephant conservation to be fully assessed and understood.

The understanding relating to the conclusion of the agreement at CoP 14 was that the nine-year moratorium would apply to all African elephant populations. Unfortunately, and as you all know, the final wording that was adopted by the Parties did not reflect the spirit of that agreement. The text of the annotation contains a loop hole which can, and has been interpreted by some parties to mean that it applies only to those populations already listed in Appendix II at the time, that is the elephant populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Taking advantage of the loop hole, Tanzania and Zambia have submitted proposals to CoP 15, seeking a down listing of their elephant populations to Appendix II, and additionally, sale of 89,000 and 23,000 kgs of ivory respectively.

It is in response to Tanzania's and Zambia's proposals that Kenya, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Republic of Congo and Rwanda in consultation with the other AEC states have jointly submitted a proposal for consideration at CoP 15, which seeks to address the loophole. It additionally seeks to extend the moratorium from 9 to 20 years from October 2008. From the foregoing, it is clear there will, once again, be significant debate at CoP15 with regard to elephants.

Following CoP 14, many parties including the EU and particularly the AEC states believed there would be a 9 year ivory trade moratorium, and consequently a rest from elephant debates at CITES, at least until October 2017. There is therefore understandable disappointment among some members that elephants are once again on the Conference of Parties agenda, and could well dominate it. In such an environment, it could pose a challenge to secure support for the coalition backed proposal 6 at CoP 15 notwithstanding its very good intentions. This meeting is therefore for strategic planning to ensure that attention is given to the coalition's proposal in the interests of the African elephant. It is crucial that we send a very clear message to other CITES parties, that our proposal would not have been drawn, or even become necessary had the spirit of the understanding of the agreement at CoP 14 been maintained. It is necessary that all the parties understand that our proposal is a direct response to Tanzania's and Zambia's announcement at the CITES Standing Committee Meeting in 2009 that they intended to submit elephant ivory trade proposals to CoP15 to down list their elephant populations and to sell stock-piled ivory. It was not the intention of the AEC to have elephants back on the Conference of Parties agenda, and we would not have found the need to bring it had proposals 4 and 5 not been submitted

by Tanzania and Zambia. If other parties understand this argument clearly, it will encourage them to support our proposal no. 6 at CoP 15.

One of the strategies that we must adopt is to lobby all CITES Parties and particularly, the European Union to support our proposal at CoP 15. We need to ensure that the European Union member states speak out during the meeting in Doha and vote in support of our proposal, and not abstain. If the EU or any other party abstains on these matters, this will effectively give the green light for the resumption of trade in ivory. An abstention in essence will be a positive vote in favour of the Tanzania and Zambia proposals to down list their elephant populations and trade in ivory. You will all therefore appreciate the importance of what you will have to do in the next few days.

Before I conclude these brief remarks, I would like to thank most sincerely all those who have made this strategy meeting happen. In particular, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Franz Weber Foundation, represented here by Ms. Vera Weber for funding this meeting and providing the consultants. I would also like to thank all those that in one way or the other have contributed to the organization of this meeting, and specifically the African Elephant Coalition Bureau team at the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Finally, I wish to thank you all the delegates here for this very important meeting, and wish you very fruitful deliberations.

It is now my pleasure to declare this meeting officially open.

Brussels, Saturday 23 January 2010